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FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8028

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 8542

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S E C R E T DHAKA 001352

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/PB AND EAP/MTS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2018

TAGS: PREL PINR MASS MARR PGOV BG BM

SUBJECT: (C) DISPUTE WITH BURMA: BANGLADESH REITERATES REQUEST FOR USG HELP

REF: A. DHAKA 1316

1B. DHAKA 1157

1C. DHAKA 1147

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Moriarty. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

11. (S) Bangladesh remains very concerned about a Burmese military buildup at the land border that divides the two countries. Army Chief General Moeen Uddin Ahmed on 12/28 reiterated to the Ambassador his earlier request (reftel A) for USG assistance to assess the buildup, specifically satellite imagery. Repeating what he told the Ambassador when he first raised the topic in mid-December, General Moeen said that Bangladesh would not tolerate any Burmese attempt to cross the border and would "teach them a lesson," if the Burmese tried to enter Bangladesh. End Summary.

Possible build up of Burmese Military Forces

12. (S) On the margins of a December 28 meeting, Bangladesh's Chief of Army Staff, General Moeen Uddin Ahmed said the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) believed Burma was upgrading its airfield at Sitwe (previously known as Akyab) to accommodate deployment of MiG aircraft. The Burmese were also improving other facilities in the Sitwe area. Reftel A documents the GOB belief the Burmese used Sitwe as a location to stockpile weapons brought in by ship from elsewhere in Burma. Particularly troubling to Moeen is the fact that the Burmese military's western command is located about thirty kilometers from Sitwe (Akyab).

Talking to the Burmese

13. (S) Moeen confided that Bangladesh had raised this issue with China, asking China to speak to Burma as a friendly nation. To date, the request seems not to have led to any change in Burmese behavior. In addition, in news that came as a surprise to us, Moeen said the Chief Adviser (Prime Minister equivalent) had two months previously nominated Moeen to serve as special envoy to Burma to resolve the current tensions. Moeen assessed that, while the Burmese were doing so in the most polite fashion, they were finding excuses to put off a visit he had requested.

Comment/Action Request

¶4. (S) Moeen registered Bangladesh's second request for assistance with assessing the "Burma threat." Understandably, this is a priority and a preoccupation for Dhaka, which was caught unawares by the maritime dispute with Burma (reftels B and C). The Bangladeshis appear convinced that there is a buildup in Burmese military presence in the hinterlands of Burma beyond the land border between the two nations. Bangladeshi assertions that their country seeks no quarrel with Burma strike us as credible. In that context, providing information to Bangladesh about Rangoon's intentions and current posture might help defuse a potentially combustible situation -- and would doubtless us as we pursue other goals with the Bangladesh government in general and with the security agencies in particular. We understand there may be some limitations on imagery sharing -- but an analysis of what we see that we could brief to senior GOB military might scratch the Bangladeshi itch in this case.

MORIARTY